

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

Monterey, California



THESIS

STATE DEVELOPMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

by

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December 2001

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE December 2001	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE: State-Development in sub-Sahara Africa			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Jean-Philippe N. Peltier				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) <p>The universal theory of state formation, as discussed by Weber, Tilly and others, is relevant and appropriate to Africa when properly applied. Africa has her own unique history and the variables affecting state development, such as land tenure, remain the same. The value of these variables is what differs from the European experience. As such, state development in Africa remains strikingly similar throughout its history. It is a struggle between the center and the periphery in which the center is hindered by three commonalities: lack of centralization, communal land ownership and patron-client systems. These commonalities worked against centralization, each building on the other and helping the periphery maintain a degree of independence rarely seen in other regions of the world. To understand modern Africa is to look at her past and see how remarkably constant her society has been. After reviewing the available literature, this thesis delves into Africa's past and shows how important it is to the understanding of her present condition. In the end, it will draw out both domestic and international policy implications for sub-Saharan Africa.</p>				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Africa, State Theory, Development, History			15. NUMBER OF PAGES	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UL	

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39-18

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STATE DEVELOPMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
December 2001**

Author:

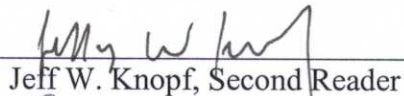


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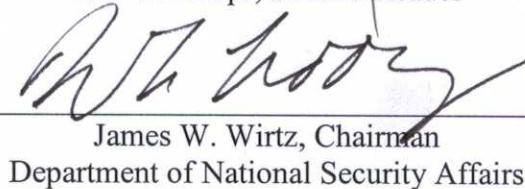
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ABSTRACT

The universal theory of state formation, as discussed by Weber, Tilly and others, is relevant and appropriate to Africa when properly applied. Africa has her own unique history and the variables affecting state development, such as land tenure, remain the same. The value of these variables is what differs from the European experience. As such, state development in Africa remains strikingly similar throughout its history. It is a struggle between the center and the periphery in which the center is hindered by three commonalities: lack of centralization, communal land ownership and patron-client systems. These commonalities worked against centralization, each building on the other and helping the periphery maintain a degree of independence rarely seen in other regions of the world. To understand modern Africa is to look at her past and see how remarkably constant her society has been. After reviewing the available literature, this thesis delves into Africa's past and shows how important it is to the understanding of her present condition. In the end, it will draw out both domestic and international policy implications for sub-Saharan Africa.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to Dr. Letitia Lawson who challenged me every step of the way, engaging me at every turn while always supporting my academic and intellectual development. She did not let me get away with much, especially viewing historical Africa as a Garden of Eden. I do not think that any professor has been able to get me to spend as much time in the library as Professor Lawson has; I am not so sure as to whether or not that is a good thing.

To Dr. Jeffrey Knopf, thank you for taking the time and providing insight. I appreciate all that you've done for me. I owe you and am appreciative of your support throughout my time here at the Naval Postgraduate School.

I would like to thank my family for all their support. They were always by my side and listened to me when I needed them most.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my mother. She is the most brilliant woman I've ever known, a constant source of inspiration and the real reason behind any success I might have achieved. Mom, I love you.

To all, a heartfelt thanks. No matter where the road leads us, it has been a life altering experience for me made possible by all of you.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis seeks to understand the African condition from the bottom up. In doing so, it looks at the historical process in determining how state development in Africa differed from that in Europe. By looking back at the historical record, the thesis extracts the necessary analytical variables for analyzing and discussing Africa. In the end, it falls back on three social structures: lack of centralization, communal land ownership and patron-client systems.

This thesis looks at new ways of analyzing and developing African institutions. Institution building is a historically rooted process, not a definition or established goal. It begins by examining existing theory on state and state building (with its heavy dependence on observations from the European experience). Determining that the European historical experience is insufficient in the understanding of sub-Saharan Africa, it turns towards the African historical record.

Insight into the historical process of state development in Africa aids analytical understanding of the continent and facilitates policy making. This approach sheds new light on the processes that drive Africa and lays the groundwork for further study. This thesis shows that the village is the heart of Africa and that it is only by engaging the village that Africa will develop and emerge from the apparent chaos.

In the end, the international community must allow African regimes to succeed and fail as warranted by their ability to connect with the village. This might mean increased chaos and disorder in the short run, but from the ashes will emerge a stable and developing Africa, one that is true to its own particular history and social structures.

Finally, this thesis will show that there can be a universal theory of state formation. The same variables that dictate state formation in Europe apply in Africa, the difference being in the value of the variable. African and Europe are different; they followed different paths but underwent similar processes. One need not invent unique African variables, such as ethnicity, to understand the current African condition.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Africa has fallen off the map. Aristide Zolberg noted over three decades ago that “the most salient characteristic of political life in Africa is that it constitutes an almost institutionless arena with conflict and disorder as its most prominent feature.”¹ Little, if anything, has changed since. Africa is slowly fading from the international scene. It is a continent plagued with weak institutions, HIV/AIDS, refugees and conflicts, just to name a few of the hurdles obstructing the path towards security, stability and development. The challenges are overwhelming.

Scholars fail to understand the current post-colonial crisis, too often seeing Africa through the western perspective, unable to look beyond into the African historical experience. It is as though the institutions imposed upon the continent from Europe during colonization take primacy over the historically rooted indigenous ones. Everything that came beforehand, the various structures, institutions and mechanisms that allowed African societies to interact and develop suddenly disappeared – or never existed at all.

Following from this failure to understand the nature of the African state is the concomitant failure of policies designed to address it. The international community prescribes remedy after remedy, in awe at Africa’s apparent inability to cure itself. Whether the remedies are appropriate is rarely questioned. Yet, the fact is that these remedies are often wholly inappropriate and based on an inadequate understanding of Africa. More attention to the actual structures and institutions, along with a long-term outlook, would greatly facilitate helping Africa leave conflict and disorder behind.

This thesis will avoid looking at Africa through ethnic or tribal lenses. Ethnic and tribal conflicts are symptoms, not the condition. It is too simplistic to simply label the situation ‘ethnic’ without attempting to look for the roots of what ails the continent. Ethnicity is a modern phenomenon with no visible history before colonialism. This thesis will not delve into the nature of ethnicity other than to state that the ethnic problem is not

¹ Zolberg, Aristide, “The Structure of Political Conflict in the New States of Tropical Africa,” *American Political Science Review*, p 70, March 1968

a historic one. Rather, this thesis will look at social structures that govern the everyday in African societies.

Thus, this thesis looks at new ways of analyzing and developing African institutions. Institution building is a historically rooted process, not a definition or established goal. Therefore, it will look to existing theory on state and state building (with its heavy dependence on observations from the European experience), but also to African history.

Insight into the historical process of state development in Africa will aid analytical understanding of the continent thus facilitating policy making. This approach will shed new light on the processes that drive Africa and lay the groundwork for further study. This thesis hopes to show that the village is the heart of Africa and that it is only by engaging the village that Africa will develop and emerge from the apparent chaos.

This chapter delves into state theory, and its application to Africa. It looks at how analysts view African institutions and structures. First, it seeks to outline the template, terminology and hypotheses that are used in analysis of the state. Once the terms of reference have been made plain, it considers whether those theoretical frameworks have been applied appropriately in the study of Africa.

A. STATE THEORY

The existing model of the state relies heavily on Max Weber. According to Weber, the exercise of political power began with the ability to garner the necessary power to deal with both internal and external situations in the localized European community. These “chiefs” had two sides to them. On one hand, they were patriarchs in their families; on the other, they were the charismatic leaders of the community – the warlord, the hunter, the sorcerer, and most importantly, the arbiter. This charismatic position was acquired without any regards to familial standing or by sets of rules. This charismatic person became a permanent fixture of the community when warfare was common.²

² For information on charismatic leadership and the rise of Kinship, read Gerth, H. H., Mills, C. Wright, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxford University Press, 1946.

The existence of a warlord did not depend on his rule over others, free or slaves. “His existence [depended] solely upon a chronic state of war and upon a comprehensive organization set for warfare.”³ As the warlord began ruling over the working masses, birth of a kingship and its royal administration come to being. Upon establishment of the kingship, all those who had vested interests, including the charismatic lord, sought legitimacy to stabilize their rule. The King was first a warlord, attaining his position through charismatic heroism. With the King, came the birth of the state.

In the end, the state was the result of an evolution of a political-territorial association gaining the monopolization of legitimate violence, or coercion.⁴ The state that arose from these processes became responsible for certain functions: legislative, police, administration of justice, the various branches of administration and the military administration.⁵

As the state evolved so did the bureaucracy.⁶ The bureaucracy administered the state through bureaus or departments staffed with non-elected officials. These officials were trained to do their job and bound by regulations. This technocratic bureaucracy became the backbone of the state, allowing it to organize and exert its monopoly of coercion. It increased the efficiency of centralized authority while limiting the effect of individual actors, constraining paths available to them. This state formation process took place over centuries in Europe.

This framework is predominant in studies of European state formation and state formation across the developing world. Africanists have also adopted Weber’s framework. Young and Turner, for instance, state that they “begin by considering the contemporary concept of state as it is universally used, with its implicit point of reference in the Western nation-state.”⁷ Others, such as Jackson and Rosberg are more implicit

³ Ibid, p 252.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 904-907.

⁵ Roth, Guenther (ed), *Max Weber: Economy and Society Vol. 2*, p 905, University of California Press, 1978.

⁶ For more information on the characteristics of and legal authority binding a bureaucracy, read *Max Weber: Economy and Society Vol. 2* pp. 956-958 and *Vol. 1* pp. 220-221.

⁷ Young, Crawford and Turner, Thomas, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, p 7, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

when referring to the European template in stating that in Africa: “in general, personal regimes may be thought of as typical of transitional periods, when one institutional order has broken down and another is yet to replace it.”⁸

Huntington⁹ emphasizes the weakness of the bureaucracy and government of developing states in relation to the others. Throughout his thorough and well documented research, he maintains the focus of his analysis on the states and their associated structures. He therefore does not see important alternative authority structures embedded in Africa historical experience, which continues to challenge and even block attempts to consolidate centralized Weberian state structure.

Similarly, he does not acknowledge the indigenous political concepts of authority and legitimacy, nor does he acknowledge indigenous institutions and mechanisms of regulating the very conflict he is studying. At one point, he refers to ‘traditional’ political systems, but focuses solely on the European experience. He concludes by describing the historical traditional polities: the bureaucratic empire and the feudal system. Even a more cursory glimpse at African history reveals no such ‘traditional polities.’ A close look would reveal entirely different ‘traditional structures.’

Peter Evans work is so firmly rooted in western theory that he states simply that “states remains as Weber defined them...”¹⁰ He then goes on to talk about the “bureaucracy of Zaire.” In fact, Zaire lacks trained technocrats following standardized procedures whose positions are not based on the whims of immediate supervisors. The public administration in Zaire is thoroughly patrimonial, with every indicator of bureaucratization (specialization, technocrats with regularly observed procedures, etc...) at an extremely low level.¹¹ Evans also talks about Zaire having infrastructural power, yet it is apparent that the Zairian administration is completely unable to penetrate society and implement its decisions. Regions act autonomously of the center, ignoring rules or

⁸ Jackson, Robert and Rosberg, Carl, *Personal Rule in Black Africa*, p 5, University of California Press, 1982.

⁹ Huntington, Samuel, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, 1968.

¹⁰ Evans, Peter, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation*, p 5, Princeton University Press, 1995.

¹¹ Joseph, Richard, *The Reconfiguration of Power in Late Twentieth-Century Africa*, in Joseph, Richard (ed), *State, Conflict, and Democracy in Africa*, p. 68, Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1999.

edicts that are of little to no relevance to them.¹² Finally, Evans concludes that the 'state' directed its energies to preventing the emergence of social groups that might have an interest in its transformation. If the 'state' does not have the capacity to implement its program, or the bureaucratic capacity to formulate it in the first place, this claim is empirically impossible. Evans misuses terms and misrepresents the nature of the state in Zaire, precisely because he relies on Weberian theory to the exclusion of African reality.

Continuing this trend, Callaghy glosses over African particularities in his analysis of Zaire stating that these "differences are important, but not in terms of the generic quality of absolutism as a form of organic-statist domination."¹³ He emphasizes the patrimonial qualities of the French and Zairian states and their highly arbitrary nature. In both cases, the state attempted to co-opt and replace locally based authorities as it sought to enhance its sovereignty, centralize control, and establish a more direct control over its population. This would allow for greater resource extraction, while whittling away at the powers of traditional authority. However, they had only limited success. As in Louis XIV's time, Zaire was faced with complex social organizations and traditional authority that continued to elude the regime.

Callaghy's comparative analysis is insightful, but he takes it too far. After decades of effort under the reign of Louis XIV, the French state made measurable progress towards its goals. Whilst in Zaire, central authorities have been unable to generate sufficient revenue and become self-supporting; they have in fact largely collapsed. The central authorities were never able to control their people or develop indigenous sources of revenue. Similarly, the bureaucracy under Louis XIV grew more technocratic and more specialized. Zaire's public administration was, if anything, less technocratic and specialized by the end of Mobutu's reign than it was at the beginning. Louis XIV's army increased its autonomy and gained the monopoly of coercion. Zaire's army has made no progress in this area. For these reasons, the 'state' in Zaire was never able to monopolize the decision-making process, nor did it ever create a single operating

¹² see Callaghy, Thomas M., *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective*, Columbia University Press, 1984.

¹³ Ibid, p. 418.

legal system. By adhering so tightly to Weber, Callaghy meticulously describes the state structures in Zaire, but in the end fails to understand that the state is completely hollow.

In short, neither modernization theory nor the statist approach has properly addressed the African situation. This brief analysis suggests the problems inherent in adopting theory without sufficient attention to historical foundations. Weberian theory does have relevance to contemporary state building, but to discover and delimit its validity, scholars must use a broader lens.

Jackson and Rosberg look for empirical evidence of the African state.¹⁴ They maintain Weberian notions and definitions of state in their analysis of Africa, but go one step further. Although they agree that African states meet the legal requirements of statehood as set by the international community, they look at whether or not African states deserve such a label given the empirical evidence. This is important for, unlike preceding scholars, they pay attention to the Weberian definition of state and bureaucracy in determining whether or not the terms apply in sub-Saharan Africa. They conclude by determining that the African state does not hold up empirically and that the development of an empirical state might be at odds with the international recognition of juridical states.¹⁵ Yet, they are unable to fully let go of the Weberian framework and fail in sufficiently considering African historicity.

Continuing this look at empirical attributes of statehood, Chabal and Daloz take Weber as a starting point in their analysis of the formations of modern states.¹⁶ They begin their inquiry by looking at the empirical realities of contemporary Africa. They argue that the state, as defined by Weber, is vacuous and ineffectual in the African context; unable to consolidate and never properly institutionalized.¹⁷ They make references to ancestral norms as incompatible with the notion of state, yet never look as to the processes driving such norms. They accurately point out that the state is little more than a façade masking the African reality, yet fail to sufficiently account for African

¹⁴ Jackson, Robert and Rosberg, Carl (eds), *Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and Juridical in Statehood*, World Politics 35, 1982.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁶ Chabal, Patrick and Daloz, Jean-Pascal (eds), *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, Indiana University Press, 1999.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 14.

historicity. They content themselves by labeling the current African situation as one of personalized political relations.¹⁸ Albeit a step in the right direction, being able to look beyond the Weberian model, they too do not sufficiently account for African historicity and corresponding social structures.

Bringing a little more historicity to the analysis, Jean-Francois Bayart starts with African countries and societies. He delves beneath the hollow state and bureaucracy in an attempt to understand what ails Africa. He criticizes western theory for including Africa in a wholly universal approach, forgetting the historical and cultural richness of African societies.¹⁹ Bayart argues that the African state is based on networks that lead to societal stratification based on access to the state. The strategy of the heads of these networks is to capture and accumulate as much wealth as possible in order to redistribute to enlarge their networks. “In other words, the social struggles which make up the quest for hegemony and the production of the State bear the hallmarks of the rush for spoils in which all actors – rich and poor – participate in the world of networks.”²⁰ This is a major step forward, in that Bayart, free from the blinder of western theory, is able to identify the centrality of patron-client networks in African society, and in its links to the state. However, Bayart goes too far in shedding the western state model completely. He misses commonalities with Europe that are enlightening, such as the stages involved in the centralization of power and state building. In discarding all theory, he makes any comparative analysis impossible.

Analysis of the African state must draw upon western experience without imposing it wholesale upon Africa’s own history. Ironically, Charles Tilly outlined a methodology for doing just this more than a quarter century ago. Tilly’s extended introduction to *The Formation of States in Western Europe* has been widely discussed, developed, adapted and adopted. However, it has not been applied to the study of Africa with the consistency and enthusiasm that Weber has. Tilly outlines a ‘theory’ of state

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 16.

¹⁹ Bayart, Jean-Francois, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, p. 5, Addison Wesley Longman Publishing, 1993.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 235.

formation in Europe, but also provides guidance on how his observations might be useful in the analysis of other world regions.

In his study of Western European history, Tilly points out several commonalities of the European experience: 1) cultural homogeneity; 2) a peasant base complemented by landlords; and 3) the emergence of states from the midst of an extensive, decentralized, but relatively uniform political structure. The European state developed from this very broad base, aided or abetted by several additional factors: a) the availability of extractible resources; b) a relatively protected position in time and space; c) a continuous supply of political entrepreneurs; d) success in war; e) strong ties between the central authorities and major segments of the landed elite; and f) an international context promoting the survival of some nation states and the disappearance of others.²¹ These factors, Tilly suggests, should drive much of contemporary state studies.

However, Tilly warns that theories of social change assume an internal coherence and standardization of experience that is unlikely to hold up. He counsels against believing that a recurrent social process governs all large-scale social change, and reminds scholars that “when our nineteenth century forebears [e.g. Weber] thought they were discovering laws of social process, they were usually reasoning within [the] confines of the capitalist world system they knew...”²² Thus, one must be alert to variability of social process across time and place. On balance, Tilly believes that European experience is relevant to the study of social processes elsewhere: conclusions drawn from exhaustive study of European history provide hypotheses for organizing the study of similar processes in other regions. Nevertheless, these hypotheses must be carefully tested against empirical data. This is where efforts to bring theory to bear on state building in Africa tend to fail.

Jeffrey Herbst, in his latest book *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*,²³ forgoes this trend and looks at Africa over the last

²¹ Tilly, Charles, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, pp. 40-45, Princeton University Press, 1975.

²² Ibid, p. 74.

²³ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, Princeton University Press, 2000.

several hundred years. He heeds the advice of Tilly and seeks to analyze Africa through historically grounded huge comparisons of big structures and large processes.²⁴ Herbst does not blindly superimpose the Western model on the Africa experience, rather, he is interested in discovering it through the historical context.

Herbst talks about the European experience as being unique, not shared with other parts of the world. He then delves into what he views as the essential dynamics of the African experience: costs of expanding authority, boundaries, and state systems. In doing so, he makes many insightful contributions to the study of Africa. Yet, his focus on geography and the center as a 'state' attempting to expand its power through space still retains a certain western bias towards centrally led processes and developments; he looks at Africa from the top down. Albeit a good start, this thesis will focus on the most basic level of African society, the village, and the various social structures and processes that bind it and others together when looking at societal development in Africa.

This thesis thus seeks to understand the African condition from the lowest common denominator. The center has always tried to project its power outward; it is in its self-interest. The most interesting variables are those that interact with the center and facilitate or hinder the process of power projection. The focus of this thesis will be in examining various social structures, common throughout the African region, and how they functioned during the process of state development.

²⁴ Ibid, 5.

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II. AFRICAN HISTORY

Sub-Saharan Africa is a large region; it is not an undifferentiated mass. In its analysis of African history, this chapter will draw out certain commonalities of the African experience shared by most of the continent while realizing that variations do exist. Societies within the continent do not necessarily share the same developmental path, nor must they have the same outcome. Nevertheless, this cursory look at African history will draw out generic themes within the African experience that will help analysts' understanding of the continent as a whole.

Africa has a rich and varied tradition of legitimate authority and institutional innovation. Basil Davidson's cursory look into Western Africa from 1000-1800 draws attention to various African societies: all self-sufficient, most relying heavily on trade. International trade helped Ancient Ghana (300-1240) prosper, as its "towns and trading settlements became the go-betweens or middlemen between the Berber and Arab traders of the north and the gold and ivory producers of the south."²⁵ It is this middleman position rather than war and taxation that helped Ghana thrive and pay for its armies. The ultimate decline of Ghana paved the way for Mali (c. 1300-1600).

Both Ghana and Mali established vast trading kingdoms.²⁶ The Portuguese court even sent emissaries to Mali in hopes of trading European goods for their gold. These early African rulers created and maintained salt and gold monopolies. To do so, they had to build effective administrative infrastructure to enforce their control. The historical record suggest that in order to avoid internal strife, the administration was very decentralized, focusing entirely on controlling access points to and from the mines and the main markets in which the goods were traded. Thus, even though they rarely controlled the gold mines themselves, they effectively controlled the distribution of gold from the mines.

Effective infrastructure and sufficient capacity was necessary to carry through and properly maintain control of trade. A leader, very much like the Weberian charismatic

²⁵ Davidson, Basil, *A History of West Africa*, p 39, Longman Group Limited, 1977.

²⁶ Curtin, Philip, and others, *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, pp. 73-99, p. 157, Addison Wesley Longman, 1995.

warlord, gathered enough support at the base to create the basis for such control: part of his tools were slaves his raiding party captured in turn used as an instrument of coercion in select areas. The fact that many of these early trading regimes depended on slaves indicates that, unlike the European warlord, his African analogue had more difficulty in establishing a 'charismatic' position. This warrants further investigation as to the possible causalities.

Regardless, African trading kingdoms, networks and communities continued, much like early European polities, to rise and fall throughout the continent: Senegambia, Songhay, Oyo, Mossi, Kanem-Bornu, and the Asante just to name a few. African regimes were dynamic: political organizations were created, rose, and fell naturally in response to opportunities and challenges.²⁷ The main reason for this constant expansion and contraction was the geographical location of the kingdoms.²⁸ Most were in the Sahel, just south of the Sahara. The desert edge was dangerous, open to both nomadic raids and subject to scarce rainfall: Ghana fell prey to both. It took some time for Mali to successfully control the desert border and claim the monopoly of both salt and gold after the decline of Ghana. The early African experience shares certain aspects of the Weberian model. Chiefs rose within communities and those with a stake in his rule, to include the chief himself, began attempts towards greater centralization. Unlike his European counterpart, the African warlord seemed to encounter social structures more successful in hindering his progress.

The fact that these early kingdoms were so heavily reliant on trade and leaders encountered such difficulty in centralizing their authority helps to begin the discussion of commonalities in Africa history. Why trade? Why could they not or did they not develop means of effectively taxing production? How did they build and sustain relatively effective administrative structures for controlling trade, and why could they not, or did they not, develop similar structures for penetrating their own societies? An initial, very limited search for the answer to these questions reveal three overarching commonalties in African history that also present sharp contrast to the history of state-making in Europe.

²⁷ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 44, Princeton University Press, 2000.

²⁸ Curtin, Philip, and others, *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, p. 94, p. 157, Addison Wesley Longman, 1995.

These commonalities in turn deserve greater attention, but the aim of this thesis is to draw them out in hopes that more will be done in the future.

A. LACK OF CENTRALIZATION

Pre-colonial African polities were consistently marked by an absence of centralization. This did not mean that individuals at the center were not trying to consolidate power, rather, the societies that they interacted with successfully resisted. The Mogho Naba, the Emperor of the Mossi within modern day Burkina Faso, was unable to bring all five kingdoms firmly under his rule.²⁹ Other strongmen with near equal capacity, fought against his centralizing effort. The King of Tenkodogo in particular, often went its own way, refusing to cede too much power to the center. He, like the Mogho Naba, drew his army from the men within his kingdom; this resulted in a balance of forces that could only be countered with the involvement of one of the three remaining Kings. Rarely would one King help another interfere in the matters of another, and the historical record suggests that the Mogho Naba was no exception. The Mogho Naba's position was not based on a chronic state of war, and, unlike his European counterpart, he was not primarily a warlord. This small deviation from the European experience merits further exploration. Nevertheless, the result was that the rather limited coercive capacity of the Mogho Naba hindered his efforts to centralize his rule.

To complicate the centralization effort, the center was never fully capable of extracting necessary financial revenue from society. There was little surplus, if any, to be collected.³⁰ Society operated on a subsistence basis, each individual responsible for his own food production; in addition, the land was poor and technology rudimentary. The villages did provide tribute, or a small amount of foodstuff, to their village chief who then passed a small percentage on through the chain until a small portion went to the central ruler. Yet, tribute was insufficient in funding the needs of the central authority. Thus, African Kingdoms often generated necessary revenue through trade, or later through external campaigns in search for booty [i.e. slaves]. Because of this detachment of the center from the means of production, central authority remained largely

²⁹ For more information, read Skinner, Elliot P., *The Mossi of the Upper Volta*, Stanford University Press, 1964.

³⁰ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 57, University of California Press, 1988.

independent of village life.³¹ This differs from the European experience where landlords effectively controlled the peasant base and successfully managed to create surplus, in turn able to raise sufficient revenue to operate. In Africa, the net result was an emphasis on controlling the center while little relative attention was paid to the hinterlands.³²

Of course, there were varying degrees of centralization within Africa. Amongst the least centralized of African societies were the Tiv and the Ibo. In these societies, authority was so dispersed that there was no permanent ruler. Those who did hold positions of power did so only temporarily, over a small group of people with clearly defined limits.³³ Village elders, priests and age groups were all responsible for certain aspects of the daily societal decision making process. The priest might be in charge of determining the start and end of the harvest season, a very important responsibility given the focus on agriculture. Yet, it would be the village elders who would chose a representative to present their greetings or grievance to another village or authority. Such societies had overlapping authority that was diffused and inherently decentralized.³⁴

The Mossi Kingdom was somewhat more centralized. The Mogho Naba, as King of Ouagadougou, officially controlled five provinces, which he placed under appointed ministers. However, each of the other four provinces were under the rule of other 'Kings' who often clashed with the appointed Imperial administrators.³⁵ The Mogho Naba did not have a standing army to enforce his rule effectively over the other Kings. This could be attributed to both the lack of external threats and a subsistence-based economy. The former did not necessitate the raising of a professional standing army; the latter complicated the Mogho Naba's taking of the men away from the village for fear of severely disrupting the food supply, possibly causing famine and consequently creating significant domestic turmoil.

³¹ Ibid, p. 58.

³² Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 46, Princeton University Press, 2000.

³³ Curtin, Philip, and others, *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, pp. 70-76, Addison Wesley Longman, 1995.

³⁴ Although a work of fiction, Curtin et al. refer to Achebe for good historical illustrations of the way the Ibos operated, Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, Prentice Hall, 1994

³⁵ Elliott P. Skinner, *The Mossi of the Upper Volta*, Stanford University Press, 1964.

The Mogho Naba did have bodyguards drawn from the ranks of palace slaves. He was not an exception as all five Mossi Kings had slaves from which to draw from for personal security. This continued inability of the center to impose its will and coerce the periphery limited the Mogho Naba's consolidation of power. European state builders successfully created permanent and professional armies detached from the land that, in time, came to recognize only the authority of the center. The best the Mogho Naba could do was to call upon other Kings to in turn call their Mossi males to form a standing army to meet external threats for limited times – or there would be no food. Thus, his inability to create a permanent army, detached from society, due to the subsistence economy complicated his quest to consolidate authority.

The Asante Kingdom (~1660-1890s) was perhaps the most centralized polity in Africa. The Asante made great strides in centralizing authority over their two hundred year old history. Indeed, with 18th century growth and elaboration, Kumase [the capital] had become significantly detached from the subsistence basis of the social order.³⁶ This historical particularity is very noteworthy. Albeit the historical record is not entirely clear, the Asante society produced landowners who were detached from the land, relying on others to tend to their fields, while they occupied themselves with the centralization of authority of the Asante regime. Unlike their historical counterparts and for reasons that are not entirely clear, they were able to begin the process of overcoming a subsistence-based economy and communal land ownership. Yet, certain other aspects of Asante society are more familiar.

The Asantehene³⁷ operated within a framework and was subject to constraints.³⁸ This was due mainly to his weakness in relation to other strongmen in spite of his ability to have overcome subsistence-based economy at the very center of his rule. The historical record suggests that the periphery remained largely tied to the land and further attempts at centralization were impeded by accompanying structures and the fact that the

³⁶ T.C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, p. 33, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

³⁷ Asantehene is the title given to the King of the Asante

³⁸ Wilks, Ivor, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of Political Order*, Cambridge University Press, 1975

Asante ruler relied on the cooperation of other rulers beyond the reach of his effective control to ensure his rule.³⁹

Most of greater Asante was administered under indirect rule. Indirect rule was the process by which regulations were adopted for maintaining the subjects in a state of subjection, without any attempt to assimilate the conquered individuals within Greater Asante, which the Asante well knew would have met with strong opposition.⁴⁰ These rules were practical, as the Asantehene gained more by their cooperation than having to conquer, or re-conquer them. Thus, further centralization of the Asante Kingdom would have required great effort which would have only been likely in response to external threats; the historical record shows greater degrees of centralization were achieved by the Asante while competing and fighting against the British during the later half of the nineteenth century.

Of all the three polities discussed here, only the Asante made significant progress in subjugating the village and centralizing its authority. It all began with the ability of the first Asantehene to begin effectively overcoming the subsistence-based economy and the creation of a decentralized political structure largely due in part to the creation of a group of landowners not tied to their land and free to pursue other occupations. The Asante appear to be the historical exception that proves the rule. Unfortunately, the British conquest of the Asante and consequent exile of their ruler in the late nineteenth century ended the process of centralization and one cannot know for sure whether or not the Asante would have successfully overcome the decentralized structures.

In general, the absence of centralization across time, space and institutional types suggests some areas for further analysis. It appears that the resources at hand were unable to support greater centralization, instead tending towards a subsistence based economy that prevented central authorities from centralizing their rule as the social and practical consequences of overcoming it proved disruptive and unsustainable over the long run. African rulers thus had to adapt to their own historical context in attempts to govern their societies and enforce their authority.

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 63

B. COMMUNAL LAND OWNERSHIP

African societies were primarily subsistence based. The absence of private land ownership was a defining factor of pre-colonial African societies. Each individual had access to the land; as such he could not be deprived from farming it. The historical record shows that a ruler could not restrict an individual's access to the land. This in turn restricted the ruler's ability to impose his will as he could not threaten an individual with the possibility of taking away his source of livelihood.

Communal land ownership tended to create an egalitarian society and reduce individual differences as none could depend on surplus and all had to tend to their own land. Even the Mogho Naba's wives had to tend their own plots of land.⁴¹ This seems to suggest that the ruler and chiefs were subject to the same conditions as those they ruled. The record suggests that African rulers were deeply integrated within their societies and much more on equal footing than their European counterparts were. Control of their population could not and did not rest on land ownership, a foreign and unattainable concept within the African historical record.

Along with the lack of privatization was the relatively equal distribution of land. Land distribution was aimed at preventing its accumulation in the hands of a few privileged individuals.⁴² Private land ownership simply did not exist and the rights of the soil were collective property protected in the structures under the control of the land chief. Landowners never emerged as the agricultural cycle barely sufficed for subsistence living and production requirement of the community.⁴³ The result seems to be a rather fragile social equilibrium that did not tolerate much disruption. This might be one aspect as to why war was a rather uncommon experience in sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, societies based on subsistence farming carry an important implication: the difficulty of creating a group of individuals no longer 'attached' to the land and free to follow different pursuits.

⁴¹ Elliott P. Skinner, *The Mossi of the Upper Volta*, Stanford University Press, 1964.

⁴² Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, pp. 117-120, University of California Press, 1988.

⁴³ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 118, University of California Press, 1988.

Europe, on the other hand, had a group of landowners who could effectively tax those who worked their land as they were the acknowledged owners of and had the right to the land. Landowners could effectively coerce and threaten their peasant population. Landownership conferred status and landowners would seek to increase the amounts of land under their control. Historically, landowners were not always warlords, but warlords were always landowners. This control of land was never part of the African experience. In fact, control of particular pieces of land was not critical to African societies.⁴⁴ Further research might show that his landownership and corresponding need for more land [whose end result is fixation on borders] led to the chronic state of war that in turn led to the organization for warfare of which Weber talks about.

In Africa, raids were occasionally conducted for slaves – until the advent of the Slave trade when such raids increased – but wars were rather uncommon. African warfare tended to concentrate on seizing booty since it was hard to hold on to territory.⁴⁵ The historical record shows that conflict in Africa was not only more localized, but also not a chronic condition of the African experience.⁴⁶

The European experience shows that war is an important factor in the consolidation of the center. Warfare necessitates defense made possible only through efficient and effective extraction. As the properties of landlords were threatened, they allied themselves with the center to better defend their interests. They provided revenue and manpower. As the demands of warfare grew, so did the demands on the central structures. They gained more prominence and capacity with time, eventually supplanting local landlords as the ultimate authority. This entire system has its roots on landownership. Landlords were effective allies to the center because they controlled the people on the land and could effectively extract resources to grow and maintain the central apparatus that was in turn completely detached from the land.

⁴⁴ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 40, Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 42

⁴⁶ read Curtin, Philip, and others, *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, pp. 144-48, Addison Wesley Longman, 1995

As African chiefs did not own the land, they had less power over their people. They could not threaten individuals by withholding their access to land. The chief could tax parts of the peasant production, but too much would disrupt the village as there would not be enough to feed his constituents. Additionally, should the chief become too demanding or unreasonable in terms of accepted practices, the historical record shows that it was not uncommon for villagers to simply walk away and migrate to another village for their right to land was never at issue and they were not tied to any one particular piece of land. The chiefs were more dependent on popular consent as the village could, in drastic times, simply walk away and leave.⁴⁷

This rather tenuous control over the village made the chief a weaker ally for central authorities, as he could not effectively mobilize resources or conscripts as effectively. Poor land conditions and natural scarcity limited conscription. The chief could not provide men during certain key phases of the agricultural cycle, such as harvest. Thus, the African chief was only of limited value in the ruler's pursuit of greater centralization as his own resources and power were limited by the subsistence based economy and communal land ownership.

C. PATRON-CLIENT SYSTEMS

Formal political control in pre-colonial Africa was difficult and had to be earned through the construction of loyalties.⁴⁸ There is no evidence that African rulers tried or wanted to control territory. Given that control of land was not a consideration, control of people became the means by which to achieve their goals.

Following from this, power at all levels in pre-colonial Africa tended to derive much more from control over people than control over land. From this base, various personal dependence relationships took form. An example would be an elder paying the bride price of a younger in exchange for labor.⁴⁹ All these relationships became effective ways of regulating social interaction and created a framework in which societies operated.

⁴⁷ Elliott P. Skinner, *The Mossi of the Upper Volta*, Stanford University Press, 1964

⁴⁸ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 41, Princeton University Press, 2000

⁴⁹ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 60, University of California Press, 1988

The Baganda were one of many who developed an effective client-patron system.⁵⁰ Clientship was based on two individuals of differing social status and social ranking; the client renders service in return for protection from the patron. The Baganda called this system 'Kusenga.'⁵¹ The underlying principle of the system was for one individual to attach himself to another. Ganda society was thus divided between the patrons, the Mwami, and those their clients, the Mukopi.

All these means of controlling others tended to have a redistributive affect. For a patron to attract clients, he had to transfer resources downward. Each villager in a Bagandan village gave a portion of his goods to the chief expecting him to carry most of the costs associated with the community [i.e. pay for funerals, provide for widows and orphans]. In return, the patron was exempt from hard labor and could call upon the men in the village for projects requiring such labor: one such chore was a regional patron asking his clients [village patrons] to provide men for road building.⁵²

The redistributive aspect of African societal relationships further complicated the centralization process. It was difficult for any one person to hoard resources or accumulate enough for additional expenses and administration. The ruler needed clients as it gave him some freedom from the land. Clients permitted patrons to use their dependent's productive labor in order to engage in trade and other pursuits aimed at strengthening their positions, resulting in a hierarchical structure that was particularly fragile as territorial authority depended solely on numbers and quality of clients.⁵³ Most of his expenses thus went into maintaining his network giving him control of other men.

Patron-client relationships were important in maintaining the integrity of the community.⁵⁴ They were a means of weaving society together. Each villager was supposed to support his chief, but the establishment of personal ties through client-

⁵⁰ Lenissongui Coulibaly *L'Autorité Dans L'Afrique Traditionnelle: Étude Comparative des États Mossi et Ganda*, p. 102, Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1983.

⁵¹ Ibid, 104.

⁵² Ibid, for more information on patron-client relationships in Buganda.

⁵³ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 61, University of California Press, 1988.

⁵⁴ Curtin, Philip, and others, *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, pp. 144-48, Addison Wesley Longman, 1995.

patronage provided a more binding and personal tie between patron and village. These relationships were another layer of the social structure in African society. These ties could be used to bind different segments of society, binding the King to some, but not others. To know about these relationships is to begin to understand how patron and client, each with their own interest, some powerful others powerless, came to cooperate.⁵⁵

African rulers sought to accumulate power. Power being, according to Weber, “the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.”⁵⁶ Most of their available resources went towards gaining and increasing their power within their given community. This process was carried out by the creation and establishment of dependence based relationships, such as client-patronage. These client-patron relationships had a decentralizing effect on authority, as patrons constantly relied on a variety of other patrons and shared power in an intricate and delicate manner. It was not simply a matter of controlling a demarcated piece of land, it was effectively controlling people. Whereas chiefs were instrumental in their villages, patrons and clients interacted at various levels throughout society, different people controlling different aspects of people at different times.

Africa simply has no history of landed elites. Rather, she has a tradition of ‘Big Men’, patron-clientship and other non-land based dependent relationships. African variants of the political entrepreneur spent most of their time developing and building their networks, sending most of the resources downward to stay on top. European resources tended to flow upward towards the landed elite. That, and the fact that Africa had fewer surpluses, greatly decreased the disposable income available to African elites. The central authority’s power was spread out through all the client-patron networks, rendering its consolidation much more difficult. The King had to depend on numerous others, each with his own interests. Whereas the European landlord could control the serf in exchange for access to his land, the African patron had to maintain his clients lest another more generous or politically capable patron come along.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.144

⁵⁶ Gerth and Mills (eds), *From Max Weber*, p. 180, Oxford University Press, 1946

All three commonalities – lack of centralization, communal land ownership, patron-client relationships – point to an economy and society, and therefore a polity, with the village at its center. These villages were comprised of small groups of individuals who were mainly subsistence farmers, with an undifferentiated social division of labor in which even patrons participated either directly or indirectly in agricultural production.⁵⁷ This was the basis of Africa's historical rhythm. African history is thus primarily the story of the village. Throughout the centuries, assortments of regimes and administrative apparatuses have emerged, each attempting to garner more power, with the goal of controlling the villages. Central authorities had little help to draw upon in their quest for extraction of what were already limited resources. These commonalities favored David, not Goliath. Thus, the quest to rule Africa is the quest to find means or the capacity to effectively incorporate the village within a centralized regime. History proves that incorporating the village into a centralized regime is no easy task, one that has never been fully accomplished.

D. COLONIAL IMPACT

Africa and Europe first came in contact through trade. It was a process of general exchange that followed the worldwide maritime revolution of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century.⁵⁸ By the end of the second half of the nineteenth century, European powers colonized virtually all of sub-Saharan Africa.

The African colonial administrative apparatus was an extension of the European nation-state. Effective occupation required the validation of claim to rule over a brief period. This was accomplished through the establishment of rudimentary infrastructure: military outposts and modest administrative centers.⁵⁹ The capacity to inflict military defeats on African rulers was not enough to rule. The direct use of armies was simply too expensive to maintain. European powers had to find a low cost solution in effectively controlling their new territorial gains. They turned to kings and chiefs that would

⁵⁷ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, pp. 117-120, University of California Press, 1988.

⁵⁸ Curtin, Philip, and others, *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, p. 182, Addison Wesley Longman, 1995.

⁵⁹ Young, Crawford, *The African Colonial State and its Political Legacy*, p. 41, in Rothchild, Donald and Chazan, Naomi (eds), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, Westview Press, 1988

collaborate with them. Colonial rule was thus two sets of structures co-existing side by side; on one hand was the colonial administration and military outposts, while on the other were traditional African rulers and structures.

Whereas colonial powers were able to use existing structures to effectively extract resources in other regions of the world, they were confronted with the same historical difficulties African rulers had faced.⁶⁰ In addition, colonial administrators had to operate with a new sense of scale. Instead of simply controlling one region or historical polity, colonial state structures sought to administer different societies as one. This made meeting the revenue imperative even more difficult. It was excruciatingly difficult as subsistence-based economies were not rich in existing revenue to begin with.⁶¹ There were some exceptions, such as the palm oil in West Africa. Colonial powers attempted various ways of extracting resources, but most failed. The few that did were tremendously costly and encumbered the colonial regime with heavy debts.⁶²

Imported concepts and institutions common to the European experience, such as constitutions and centralized administration were superimposed upon existing pre-colonial regimes and polities. These concepts did not apply to the African experience and did not fit within the African historical context. Further complicating the colonial task in the early stages, was the fact that there simply was not enough colonial administration to effectively impose such institutions. Thus, colonial powers had to find ways of connecting with existing authority.

The existing African structures and the colonial administration constantly interacted. African chiefs and leaders sought to preserve whatever privilege they could, by accepting for better or worse positions offered them within the colonial administration while learning to manipulate it for their own benefit.⁶³ Yet, their acceptance of colonial management did not necessarily imply the acceptance of the village. Passive resistance to colonial administration from the African village was common, and there were early

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 37-38.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 45.

⁶² Ibid, p. 47.

⁶³ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 203, University of California Press, 1988.

instances of village uprisings. In each case, the colonial powers had to come to terms with ways of controlling the population through more traditional means. Colonial regimes had to work with and through the chiefs.

The inability of colonial administrators to penetrate society resulted in this forced relationship between colonial administration and historical power. The chiefs occasionally benefited from colonial attempts to strengthen their rule, yet still controlled the people and allocation of land at the base level.⁶⁴ The colonial state was meeting some of the historical challenges of the African center, namely the inability to overcome a subsistence economy based on communal land ownership. But whereas historical Africa developed a multi-layered means of tying society together in the form of patron-client relationships, colonial administrators attempted to control their society through western means based on their own experience.

Migdal argues that colonial powers used three mechanisms to undermine and reconstruct political authority in the third world. First, the colonialization process ostensibly involved changes in land tenure.⁶⁵ Second, exposure to international capitalism facilitated the state's ability to tax production. Third, colonial governments opened up rural areas through the construction of transportation infrastructure. In Africa, however, the particularities of history intervened forcefully to block these processes.

Colonial administrators never abrogated the peasants' right to land. They could barely afford to keep a few military outposts and some administrative centers. They relied on traditional chiefs and patrons to implement their rule. Whereas these patrons facilitated the colonial process, they would not voluntarily undermine the basis of their own authority by drastically changing land ownership rights. The colonial administrators in Africa never had the bureaucratic machinery of a Vietnam to extract surplus and effectively tax; their main currency was labor.⁶⁶ Again, this labor was supplied to them

⁶⁴ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 173, Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁶⁵ For the complete argument, read Migdal, Joel S., *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capability in the Third World*, pp. 64-80, Princeton University Press, 1988.

⁶⁶ Young, Crawford, *The African Colonial State and its Political Legacy*, p. 45, in Rothchild, Donald, Chazan, Naomi (eds), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, Westview Press, 1988.

through intermediaries of whom they exercised minimal active control. African colonial administrators simply could not implement the three mechanisms as Migdal suggests.

Faced with the realities of African history, colonial administrators, instead, shifted their focus to finding ways to control the people. In the formative phases of colonialism, administrators acquired formidable responsibility in the organization and direction of African labor.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, colonial regimes were not all that more successful in extracting labor than they were with production. Colonial attempts to extract labor were often rejected and led to numerous local peasant uprisings.⁶⁸ Unlike their predecessors, they did not control the people through patron-client relations; additionally they did not want or need clients. The main object of the European regime was to seek and extract revenue. The European regime thus accommodated existing structures to minimally control African society in attempts to successfully extract revenue. The African village successfully resisted centralized colonial control, frustrating colonial regime strategies by preventing the effective taxation of production and extraction labor.

While the colonial administration claimed all powers of government in theory, it lacked the necessary manpower and knowledge to effectively back up its claim.⁶⁹ Chiefs occasionally rebelled by refusing to pay taxes or supply labor pools, but these incidents did not last too long and rarely benefited the chief or those under him. The chief was the interpreter of colonial policy to his subordinates. His position was difficult as he was used for his connection to African society, but his continued rule depended heavily on an exogenous power.⁷⁰ He was able to rule his constituency through patron-client relationships, but was now responsible to certain pressures exerted from colonial administrators in their own drive to control the people. This likely affected his own capacity to control the population as the village began seeing him more as a puppet of the colonial administration.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 47.

⁶⁸ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p 172, University of California Press, 1988.

⁶⁹ Curtin, Philip, and others, *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, p. 426, Addison Wesley Longman, 1995.

⁷⁰ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p 93, University of California Press, 1988.

The chief was in fact ‘collaborating’ with the colonial regime. This was part of a cost benefit analysis on the part of the chief. He could count on the support of the central regime to enforce his own rule vis-a-vis other individuals, and had support in his dealing with his inferiors as the colonial powers depended on the chief.⁷¹ This put him in an ambiguous position, as he was both the colonial link to tradition simultaneously depending on the regime for his position. Thus, the colonial regimes used traditional authority but restricted its ability to maneuver. The use of traditional authority was dysfunctional and led to the destruction of some of the chiefs who lost the very basis of their power.⁷² The record suggests that the village could disengage from the collaborating chiefs and live independently through their historical social structures, namely those village chiefs to whom they owed their primary loyalties. Nevertheless, the chiefs who collaborated became the bureaucrats of the colonial administration and would soon compete for power with new westernized African elites.

During colonization, colonial powers selected Africans to receive western education. Unlike the chiefs who were used for more localized administrative control, these new elites were trained as clerks within the central administration. No one really foresaw the coming of independence, but these clerks were the ones who would stand to inherit the colonial apparatus. Literacy skills and competence were important criteria in the selection process of these new elites.⁷³ These westernized African did not have ties to historical African societies, other than through kinship. They soon began filling posts alongside the Europeans in the civil administration of the regime. These elites ran into the same problem as the European administrators and had to find ways of connecting with the village in an attempt to implement their policies. Westernized elites wanted to assert their own authority, yet villages held on to their traditional chiefs as the legitimate source of authority, albeit some were more legitimate than others.

A new set of indigenous elites was set to govern through foreign structures without effective social control of the village. Additionally, they tended to repudiate

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 93

⁷² Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 92, Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁷³ Young, Crawford, *The African Colonial State and its Political Legacy*, p. 49, in Rothchild, Donald, Chazan, Naomi (eds), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, Westview Press, 1988.

their own history, viewing it as backward and incompatible with their own desires for a westernized state. Challenging their claim to authority were the traditional chiefs who were more closely tied to African society and understood the social structures governing African society. There would be many challenges ahead with the village continuing to drive African history.

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III. POSTCOLONIAL STATE

The quest of the postcolonial African administrative apparatus is, like all its predecessors, the capture of the village. Interestingly enough, the new African elites immediately adopted the structures and institutions left by the colonial powers. Africa's new leaders did not foresee the newly independent regimes as anything but within the mold of the European nation-state. Liberation from colonial rule went hand in hand with liberation from traditional structures.⁷⁴

African leaders were faced with the problem of having to extend power over their inherited territories. They had to do so with an incomplete and highly variable administrative system [i.e. presidency, 'bureaucracy', military] inherited from the colonial powers.⁷⁵ Colonial administration never successfully established mechanisms that actually sought to rule over territories that they claimed belonged to them; they lacked the necessary infrastructure to formally control large amounts of land beyond their central administration.⁷⁶

The essence of the postcolonial history of sub-Saharan Africa is therefore an unresolved struggle: westernized elites seeking to extend their control over society, most of which is rural, and the village, determined to preserve traditional authority.⁷⁷ Postcolonial authority thus attempted to build their new states while initially rejecting their own history. The very same traditional structures they sought to repudiate hindered their centralization efforts.

A. LACK OF CENTRALIZATION

Just like those that came before it, the post-independence authorities sought to effectively centralize their authority. The new African rulers were thus faced with two formidable challenges: 1) to increase the capacity of inherited structures and 2) find ways

⁷⁴ Davidson, Basil, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, p. 74, Three Rivers Press, 1992.

⁷⁵ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in Authority and Control*, pp. 42 and 97, Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 96.

⁷⁷ Bratton, Michael, *Peasant State Relations in Postcolonial Africa: Patterns of Engagement and Disengagement*, p. 231, in Migdal, Joel and Kohli, Atul, and Shue, Vivienne (eds), *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Thirst World*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

of connecting with their respective societies. While the colonial regime had limited goals, the postcolonial regime sought to increase its economic viability while strengthening their structures of control and building a western styled 'state.' African elites sought ways of undermining traditional authority and social structures, imposing themselves as sole arbiters of policy and force in the process.

African leaders sought to increase their administrative capacity, centralizing their authority in the process. They first began by attempting to increase the capacity of their inherited administration. African regimes tried to create bureaucratic establishments with the necessary power to formulate and implement policy.⁷⁸ Yet, in creating their administrative mechanism, they succeeded mainly in further alienating themselves and the societies that they wanted to govern.

Congo Brazzaville had a nine-fold increase of public employees between 1960 and 1972 and the fact that the total salaries of the agricultural staff – forty percent of whom are located in the capital city – exceeded the total cash income of the country's 6,000,000 peasants is clear evidence of center-society disjuncture.⁷⁹ This only served to further entrench westernized elites within the inherited structures while distancing themselves from society. African leaders were detached enough from society as it was. Often western educated and immersed into the colonial structures, they had long abandoned their traditional ties to the village, save the family.

African regimes needed to connect with their societies, or find means of penetrating them. The aim was to establish their administration as the dominant authority throughout society.⁸⁰ Their goal was to move towards a more complete incorporation of society using the remnant of colonial governments and authority. To do so, they had to bring local authority under their control so that they could in turn control their populations. One of the biggest impediments to the center's control was communal land ownership.

⁷⁸ Forrest, Joshua, *The Quest for State Hardness in Africa*, p. 424, Comparative Politics, July 1988.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 425.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 427.

Changes in land tenure remained the most difficult challenge for the central administration. Land, being controlled by local chiefs, renders chiefs the broadest political unit with which rural Africa is directly concerned.⁸¹ Communal land ownership was at the very center of the central administration's inability to further consolidate its authority; thus its corresponding quest to subvert communal property in attempting to gain dominance. This historical process remained a defining factor of African society. The land tenure system underscored the position and authority of the chief.⁸² This prevented the center from effectively controlling the population.

B. COMMUNAL LAND OWNERSHIP

Realizing that communal land tenure limited the capacity of the regime, the administrative apparatus sought to carry out land reforms.⁸³ These were ostensibly done for economic reforms, but it was actually an attempt on the part of the administrative apparatus to assert its control over the chief, thus the village. There were variations on the theme, but most did not get very far.

Zairian authorities passed a land law in 1973 whose stated purpose was to institutionalize the appropriation of private property.⁸⁴ This was more of an attempt to control the village. The law sought to replace the village chief as the arbiter of land by the central administration. In other words, the regime attempted to grant all or part of the territory of the village to an individual of its choosing.⁸⁵ In doing so, it hoped to supplant the authority of the chief and increase the centralization of its authority. Nevertheless, the policy failed. Others took a radically different approach in a similar attempt of subverting traditional authority.

Tanzania had one of the more imaginative means of attempting to control the villages. The administration of Tanzania claimed the existence of a food crisis in 1974-1975. In so doing, it announced its policy of Ujamaa, compelling farmers to abandon

⁸¹ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 180, Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁸² Ibid, p. 182.

⁸³ Migdal, Joel S., *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capability in the Third World*, p. 185, Princeton University Press, 1988.

⁸⁴ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 133, University of California Press, 1988.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 134.

their historical land and move into administrative villages.⁸⁶ It, on a small scale, was trying to usurp historical authority by forcibly moving people into villages under central control. By taking people out of their traditional social environment, the belief was that they would be more open to change.⁸⁷ In the end, the Ujamaa scheme failed largely due to peasant indifference and administrative inability to successfully engage them.⁸⁸ There were other attempts at subverting traditional sources of authority. Regardless of the variation on this attempted means of usurping traditional authority, the postcolonial administrations remained largely unable in controlling society, and the villages successfully retained their rights to land: their connection to the land persisted.⁸⁹

Kenya was one of the few regimes that successfully eroded some of the traditional connection to land. Through a settlement transfer scheme, they created a new landowning class amongst indigenous elites and with the land registration program, they were able to have a process in which land could be transferred from one person to another.⁹⁰ With these processes, the central regime managed, with the help of the British colonial power, to create an African landowning class and a landless workforce. Both schemes managed to increase the incorporation of society into the new regime.

The process of settlement was carried out before the end of colonization. It was carried out in such a way that society would have to uphold the sanctity of private ownership.⁹¹ In doing so, it also created a new stratum of larger peasant landowning producers, more tied into and dependent on the administration for their newfound wealth. This process complemented that of land registration. Although many peasants became landless, some had sold their plots to neighboring ones rich enough to buy them. The

⁸⁶ Bates, Robert, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The political basis of Agricultural Policies*, p. 84, University of California Press, 1981.

⁸⁷ Hyden, Goran, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry*, p. 71 University of California Press, 1990.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 77.

⁸⁹ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 299, University of California Press, 1988.

⁹⁰ Leys, Colin, *Underdevelopment in Kenya*, pp. 63-117, University of California Press, 1975.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 115.

land registration scheme allowed some to enlarge their holdings, thus creating a type of Kenyan 'Kulak.'⁹²

These two schemes combined allowed a new 'structure' to rise from the rural area, one heavily tied to the central regime. At the top were very large-scale individual landowners, some with several hundred acres, all linked professionally, socially, and economically to the colonial and, consequently, post-colonial regime.⁹³ At the bottom was a growing number of landless laborers and small peasant freeholders with little access to the regime. Unlike many other regimes in Africa, Kenya was one in which the center was able to increase its capacity at the expense of the village.

African elites, through the administrative structures they inherited from colonial powers, sought to expand their penetration and control of society. Yet, these attempts at incorporation proved to be minimal and the center has failed to effectively penetrate society.⁹⁴ This complicated their efforts to generate revenue. Regimes were always heavily dependent on indirect taxation, especially on commodity taxes.⁹⁵ The ratio of revenue from commodity exports to GDP rose from 24 percent in 1966 to 35 percent in 1982; as much as 60 percent of the tax increase during that same period can be attributed to the total yield from commodity taxation.⁹⁶ African regimes never successfully changed their revenue base, remaining heavily dependent on commodity export tax. This meant a heavy reliance on the village for survival.

African administrators sought to extract resources to meet the revenue imperative but had limited success in taxing the villages' export commodities. They were never able to transform their material base, and their reach rarely extended to the point of production, the village.⁹⁷ They attempted to draw from a largely agricultural population

⁹² Ibid, p. 115.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 116

⁹⁴ Forrest, Joshua, *The Quest for State Hardness in Africa*, p. 431, Comparative Politics, July 1988.

⁹⁵ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 117, Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁹⁶ Shalizi, Zmarak and Squire, Lyn, *Tax Policy in sub-Saharan Africa*, World Bank, 1988

⁹⁷ Chazan, Naomi, *Patterns of State-Society Incorporation and Disengagement in Africa*, p. 125 in Rothchild, Donald, Chazan, Naomi (eds), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, Westview Press, 1988.

a reliable income sufficient to support the regime's expenditure needs.⁹⁸ African regimes sought to channel the resources of the village into their administration.

Central authorities required resources to appease the urban populations. African elites equated the survival of the regime with appeasement of urban population – a small portion of African society – via subsidies even if the much larger, and poorer, rural populations had to be taxed.⁹⁹ This is important as the village had resources central authority deemed necessary for survival, while the village could survive, albeit on a subsistence level, without the regimes. The peasants themselves were unconcerned with the need for a surplus, remaining subsistence based.¹⁰⁰ Some African regimes developed a strategy of revenue extraction involving marketing boards.

Marketing boards were used because agriculture represents the principal economic activity in most of Africa and can generate the most foreign exchange.¹⁰¹ They were inherited colonial structures. These agencies controlled the market for agricultural export and were often the greatest source of revenue for the central administration. These proved to be an effective source of replenishing administrative coffers; effectively taxing the village. There was a catch; in order to have goods to tax [i.e. coffee, cocoa and other primary goods] and generate this revenue and associated benefits, the regime depended on the African villages to produce.

African regimes, using the inherited government and administrative structures, sought to nationalize, monopolize, control currency and whatever else they could imagine in an attempt to effectively extract from the population.¹⁰² Senegal attempted to nationalize the peanut trade; Cameroon, Ghana, Zambia and others used marketing boards; Guinea-Bissau attempted to create monopolistic stores controlled by the central

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 431.

⁹⁹ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 18, Princeton University Press, 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 117, University of California Press, 1988.

¹⁰¹ Bates, Robert, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis of Agricultural Policies*, p. 13, University of California Press, 1981.

¹⁰² Forrest, Joshua, *The Quest for State Hardness in Africa*, p. 433, Comparative Politics, July 1988.

apparatus aiming to channel the sales of peasant surplus. Nonetheless, success has been limited.

Even though regimes have been able to control parts of rural trade and extract some revenue from it, in virtually all countries unofficial or parallel markets have expanded alongside.¹⁰³ This involved the barter and exchange of goods outside the regime's effective control. By 1970, as much as ninety percent of surplus crops and artisan goods were believed to have been induced into the parallel market in response to low official prices and poor terms of trade with the central administration because of its inability to effectively monitor, much less monopolize the village activities.¹⁰⁴

While African regimes have been able to appropriate some surplus, the fragmentation of social control greatly restricted the growth of African regimes after independence.¹⁰⁵ Postcolonial regime attempts at centralizing their authority did not go very far. This could be because while it sought greater centralization and capacity for policy implementation, its only connection with society was through the historical means of patron-client relationships. As such, regime longevity had less to do with its policy implementation ability than its ability to connect with the periphery.

C. PATRON-CLIENT SYSTEMS

The historical means in which the center sought to accommodate the varied interests of the village and control society was through patron-client relationships. Westernized elites fell back on this tried and true means in an attempt to effectively govern society. This system of brokers and mediators continuously interceded between society and central authority.¹⁰⁶

Historically, centralized authority was never completely dependent on the village for its survival. The control of the village was hard and political control could never be taken for granted given that the environment made it so difficult to continually exert

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 434.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 434.

¹⁰⁵ Chazan, Naomi, *Patterns of State-Society Incorporation and Disengagement in Africa*, p. 141 in Rothchild, Donald, Chazan, Naomi (eds), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, Westview Press, 1988.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 129.

authority over significant distances.¹⁰⁷ African regimes relied primarily on trade to generate the necessary revenue to support their functions. As such, the village was able to set the tone of the patron-client relationship.

These political exchanges between centralized elites and the villages were an administrative necessity; sub-Saharan regimes had little alternative but to enter into political exchange with the periphery.¹⁰⁸ This is due to its discussed inability to impose itself on society. Without these political exchanges, the center would become entirely irrelevant. In effect, those who control the central administration did not control society. As such, they had to find ways to connect with the village in an effort to gain minimal control and retain some relevance.

Centralized elites thus compensated for their inability to effectively control society by entering political exchanges with traditional authority. Though tough tactics might have been appealing to Obote¹⁰⁹ in dealing with the Buganda, he lacked the military capacity to control society.¹¹⁰ He thus resorted to dealing with the village ambassadors who each jockeyed for their own interest.¹¹¹ He was by no means the exception to the rule. Bargaining skills became a necessity of African regimes because of their inability to impose terms over semi-autonomous peripheral authority.¹¹²

The relationship between patron and clients is in its ideal form based on mutual trust and deference.¹¹³ Just as services are expected from the client, so are obligations on the part of the patron. These relationships involve a multitude of actors. “When

¹⁰⁷ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in Authority and Control*, p. 41, Princeton University Press, 2000.

¹⁰⁸ Rothchild, Donald, *Hegemonial Exchange: An Alternative Model for Managing Conflict in Middle Africa*, p. 82, in Thompson, Dennis, Ronen, Dov (eds), *Ethnicity, Politics, and Development*, Boulder Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986.

¹⁰⁹ Obote was the leader of Uganda in the late 70s and in the early 80s following Idi Amin. The Buganda are a storied historical Kingdom within Uganda.

¹¹⁰ Rothchild, Donald, *Hegemonial Exchange: An Alternative Model for Managing Conflict in Middle Africa*, p. 82, in Thompson, Dennis, Ronen, Dov (eds), *Ethnicity, Politics, and Development*, Boulder Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 77.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 83.

¹¹³ Lemarchand, Renee, *African Peasantries, Reciprocity and the Market*, p. 45, Cahier D’Etudes Africaines 29, 1989.

exchanges operate among equal or near equals chances are that trust and self-interest will combine to reinforce each other and pave the way for mutually rewarding forms of exchange; threats of 'negative' exchange, on the other hand, are never more real than in situations of sharp and persistent inequalities."¹¹⁴ In the postcolonial regime, patron-client networks are heavily reliant on the village for the extraction of resources; this gave the relationship a distributive aspect.

In modern Africa, these relationships are most clearly expressed through the electoral process. In Kenya, parliamentary MPs had to reach out to the periphery. MPs needed to devote far greater time in their local community to ensure they were not voted out of office.¹¹⁵ Legislators acted as representatives of their villages exclusively, in fact becoming modern patrons. As such, their constituency expected them to represent the interests of the village to the center. The MP is thus viewed not only as a representative of the administration but also as village patron capable of extracting resources for the local community. These MPs would promise to spend extensively in their villages, to include clinics, schools, wells and whatever other primarily social needs the village might demand. The crucial factor for the village was the MP's ability to provide available resources. Without resources to provide to the village, the MP lost significance and the connection between the center and its periphery was severed. Either the MP kept his position and the connection remained severed, or the village voted in another MP more capable of extracting resources from the center and the connection resumed; either way, the connection was made based on the village's decision, not that of the center.

As such, the revenue collected from the village is re-distributed to the village in one form or another. The patron-client networks lead to an economy of social-welfare. One example is Nigeria, in which a patron gained access to the regime by promising to spend heavily on health and education if elected by the villages.¹¹⁶ This is an example of the economy of affection; one that takes into account the expensive patronage practices in

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 45.

¹¹⁵ Barkan, Joel, *Legislators, Elections, and Political Linkage*, p. 74, in Barkan, Joel (ed), *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania*, Praeger, 1984.

¹¹⁶ Bates, Robert, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The political basis of Agricultural Policies*, p. 14, University of California Press, 1981.

Africa due to the clients controlling and driving the process.¹¹⁷ This type of redistributive aspect is not new; rather it is a continuation of pre-colonial times.

Additionally, patron-client relationships are integrated into hegemonic exchanges. These exchanges relied on reciprocity and the “rhythm of ethnic political interchanges, along the lines of established patron-client networks.”¹¹⁸ The village still drove the process, but those on top could not effectively connect with all segments and the multitude of actors that comprised such patron-client networks. Another layer thus had to be added to connect all segments and actors.

This layer is known as a hegemonic exchange. Hegemonic exchanges are a form of regime-facilitated coordination in which a somewhat autonomous central regime and structures and a number of other interests, engage based on commonly accepted understandings in a process of mutual accommodation.¹¹⁹ This exchange is one of necessity. Without it, managing the various segments of society would be a near impossibility as all have different interest. Without mutual accommodation, the regime would not survive. Hegemonic exchanges complicate regime decision-making ability as the center must coordinate all policy through the various other segments before it can proceed. To connect with their entire society, African regimes needed to connect with patrons from each segment.

In light of the scarcity prone conditions of Africa, neither hegemonic control nor direct political exchange accurately describes regime dynamics.¹²⁰ African regimes, often under the control of the Presidency, thus used a semi-codified set of procedures to manage their networks. These networks were an additional layer within the patron-client relationships. It was part of the ongoing stream of these informal regime-societal exchanges that determine stable and effective inter-group relations.¹²¹ It must be

¹¹⁷ Hyden, Goran, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry*, p. 19, University of California Press, 1980.

¹¹⁸ Rothchild, Donald, *Hegemonial Exchange: An Alternative Model for Managing Conflict in Middle Africa*, p. 66, in Thompson, Dennis, Ronen, Dov (eds), *Ethnicity, Politics, and Development*, Boulder Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 72.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 70.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 70.

remembered that as much as the office of the President wanted to control society, it could only survive by maintaining its connection with the village on which it was dependent for political support. This connection was maintained through endless layers of patron-client systems brought together at the top through hegemonic exchange. This exchange is not a new phenomenon. Historically, African leaders have relied on top-level layers to effectively manage their patron-client systems.

The Mogho Naba of the Mossi relied on a 'hegemonic exchange' to govern his country.¹²² He included Ministers of various groups and social status in his administration. The Ninissi, a small segment of society, could always count on filling the post of the Minister of Religion. The Mogho Naba even had a 'slave' as his Minister of Defense. The Mogho Naba thus ensured proportional representation as his own survival and retention of power was at stake. Thus, modern leaders simply borrowed traditional means of management in an attempt to keep the various segments of their networks engaged and prevent defections that would otherwise weaken their position.

Westernized elites, like their predecessor the Mogho Naba, had difficulty in effectively controlling their society. Consequently, they had to insure that all segments were represented in the patron-client relationships to ensure their own survival. Dependence on the village drove them to this proportional representation as failure to receive the tacit approval of any one segment could effectively bring down central authority. Again, just like historical African societies, the result was a very low level of centralization of authority.

D. PATTERNS OF INCORPORATION AND DISENGAGEMENT

The rhythm of African society thus varies from incorporation to disengagement. African regimes have not been significant actors in the everyday life of the village. As the central regime sought to centralize and increase its capacity, society either can be incorporated or attempt to disengage. Initially, the village engaged the center at independence given the euphoria of the moment and various promises made by westernized elites. With time, the village began to disengage realizing that the center offered less and less while asking for more than the village was willing to provide. Had the village not been the basic unit of production and a necessity for the center to survive,

¹²² Elliott P. Skinner, *The Mossi of the Upper Volta*, Stanford University Press, 1964.

disengagement might not have been an option, but as things stood, the village could walk away from the center.

It is generally accepted that a regime would seek to incorporate its society as it strengthened centralized control and increased its extraction ability. However, greater incorporation could have increased the burden of the regime and may have caused an overextension of its already limited capacity, as far as the input of incorporated groups did not always match the resources allocated to them.¹²³ The scarcity of resources was often such that what the village brought to the center did not offset the maintenance costs in the form of new clinics, wells or schools. As much as the center might have wanted to incorporate the village through the patron-client system, it could not effectively maintain such relationships. Nevertheless, more often than not the center wanted to engage and incorporate the village.

Given the scarcity of resources, the regime might seek to counter disengagement by attempting to further exert its already limited capacity to control; send out the military to oversee village moves [i.e. Ujamaa], threaten local authority with sanctions should their village fail to produce and so on. However, these attempts to prevent disengagement did not reduce it so much as push it to more extreme forms.¹²⁴ If withdrawal is illegal, villages might simply choose to ignore or by-pass the laws; and if that fails, they might fall back to the historical practice of leaving the land and migrating¹²⁵, or more seriously rebel or form a separatist movement [i.e. Biafran Republic in Nigeria.]

African patterns of incorporation and disengagement show that the regime is not a monolith. African regimes, thanks largely to the colonial legacy, are the main actors that interact with society; they are a repository of tremendous resources obtained from international sources in the form of foreign aid, investment of foreign capital,

¹²³ Azarya, Victor, *Reordering State-Society Relations: Incorporation and Disengagement*, p. 15, in Rothchild, Donald, Chazan, Naomi (eds), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, Westview Press, 1988.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 16.

¹²⁵ History shows that villagers would, if sufficiently motivate, desert the village and move elsewhere or under the authority of another chief.

international loans and political military resources.¹²⁶ Disengagement is not a passive activity; it is a choice. Consequently, villages held on to historical structures with tenacity and responded to, though not necessarily in accordance with, regime actions.¹²⁷

So far, it seems that the center's dependency on commodity export alongside with village self-sufficiency has led to greater disengagement than incorporation. For greater incorporation to occur, African regimes must first find means of becoming self-sufficient. This would in turn allow them to increase their capacity to implement policy and render the center more attractive to the village.

E. WEAKENING OF THE REGIME

The postcolonial regime lost its battle with the village. Social structures were such that they favored the village in its interaction with the center. To continue funding its efforts to supplant the village, the center needed to generate revenue. In this case, revenue was reliant on the increased production of commodity exports, which the village controlled. The center's low revenue did not allow it to provide the needed social services demanded by the village. Consequently, the village disengaged from its relationship with the center.

With decreased revenues, central authority increasingly lost relevance to the village. Without resources to provide, they were not attractive as patron; the relationship was no longer mutually rewarding, as the village could not get obligations in return for their services. The center atrophied to such a point that western scholars began to refer to it as weak and vacuous, unable to meet the Weberian definition.¹²⁸ Of course, the center was never a state to begin with, but now it cannot even maintain its façade as 1) it no longer receives the necessary influx of resources to keep the village engaged, and thus 2) loses all ability to interface with the village and whatever little control it had over production. In the end, society found centralized regimes not particularly useful, and at

¹²⁶ Azarya, Victor, *Reordering State-Society Relations: Incorporation and Disengagement*, p. 18, in Rothchild, Donald, Chazan, Naomi (eds), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, Westview Press, 1988.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 18.

¹²⁸ Chabal, Patrick, Daloz, Jean-Pascal, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, p. 1, Indiana, University Press, 1999

times even threatening of their historical rights. As such, it ended its incorporation, however informal, and disengaged more and more from the center.

As the center could no longer turn towards the village and attempts to effectively incorporate it proved too difficult, it focused its attention elsewhere. This is what happened in areas rich in natural mineral resources, especially diamonds: allowing central authority to use the administrative apparatus for private, versus collective interest.¹²⁹ A good example of such a regime would be Liberia. It is a regime that the village can no longer control through traditional and historical means: patron-client relationships.

This regime becomes that of the warlord.¹³⁰ It is one in which the westernized elites cease all efforts to incorporate African society. These regimes not only lost all connection with the village, unlike the others, they do not need the village. Elites in a warlord regime control markets to enhance their power. Control over commerce, rather than people, becomes the key demarcator of political power.¹³¹ In this aspect, warlord regimes closely resemble historical societies, but unlike their historical predecessors, they are disconnected from the societies in which they operate. In addition, modern warlords are not warlords in the true sense of the word. Their focus was to control the mineral trade; as such, they are not interested in territorial expansion. Those without minerals to trade are not warlords at all, they are simply desperately holding on to whatever vestiges of power and authority remaining in their particular area, but lacking the ability to generate revenue through mineral trade, their continued survival is unlikely.

Of note, historical societies did not have many warlords. The center maintained its connection with the village and never achieved the levels of financial independence of modern day warlord regimes. Again, some old is mixed with some new. In this respect, Achille Mbembe is correct in stating that there are continuities between pre- and post-colonial Africa in the exercise of power, the resort to violence, and the nature of political authority.¹³²

¹²⁹ Reno, William, *Warlord Politics and the African States*, pp. 2-3, Lynne Rienner, 1998

¹³⁰ For detailed information, read *ibid*.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 71.

¹³² Cited in Richard, Joseph, *The Reconfiguration of Power in Late Twentieth-Century Africa*, p. 58, in Joseph, Richard (ed), *State, Conflict, and Democracy in Africa*, Lynne Rienner, 1999.

Individuals such as Doe and Taylor, using their private armies, managed to gain control over natural resources, leaving the villages to fend for themselves. The village was completely cut off from the elites and lost all meaning in the elite calculation of power. This is an extreme disassociation of the center from society, from which there might not be any coming back until the depletion of natural resources. Sadly, this is but the outcome of a long experiment began with colonialization to westernize Africa while denying her own historicity and achievements.¹³³

With the exception of such warlord regimes, African regimes continue to seek means of controlling people. Land, remaining a communal asset, is not up for grabs. As such, modern regimes must find ways of bringing value to the village in order to gain some control over its production. The most effective means of doing so is that of patron-client networks. However, for these networks to survive, resources are needed. As of now, the village is able to live through subsistence farming and the elites have yet to offer enough incentive for them to abdicate some of their autonomy and to incorporate themselves within a larger social framework. The incentives in question are primarily social goods such as education and clinics. The villages need to get something in return for their incorporation and engagement with the center. For the village to provide necessary revenue to the center, it is important that the center provide basic and necessary services to the village.

Africa has a history of societal structures of participation and accountability, yet those of the past [i.e. The Asantemanhyiamu¹³⁴ of the Asantehene] belong to a time that is gone.¹³⁵ History can serve as a guide that would allow modern regimes to stabilize and successfully incorporate itself into African society. The new elites might not be able to bring back the past, but they can create a new future. The incentive was lacking as resources managed to flow in through their central structures, but as the village continues

¹³³ Davidson, Basil, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, p. 245, Three Rivers Press, 1992

¹³⁴ The Asantehene ruled along side the Asantemanhyiamu (National Assembly) and was advised by a "Council of Four." The Asantemanhyiamu was comprised of district rulers and Kumase chiefs.

¹³⁵ Davidson, Basil, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation State*, p 314, Three Rivers Press, 1992.

to disengage from them, their continued survival will depend on their ability to re-connect.

In looking at the future, African regimes should take into account their own historical record: one that favors strong decentralization, communal land ownership and primacy of the village. Past regimes – that of the Mogho Naba of the Mossi or the Kabaka of the Baganda – succeeded while realizing their own limits on attempts for greater centralization. African leaders in the future will be forced to accept the limits of their power inherent in African history and structures if they are to survive.

IV. CONCLUSION

The European experience is not the African one. State developmental theories, assumed universally applicable, have failed to adequately account for the African experience, yet this has more to do with application rather than actual theory. In Africa, the interaction between the center and the periphery has differed significantly from that of Europe. Centralization of authority has always been an African challenge from the precolonial period, through the short but brutal time of colonialism, to the independence of African regimes.

A. STATE FORMATION IN AFRICA

State formation in Africa followed a drastically different path than that of the European experience. Three aspects in particular merit further consideration and discussion: 1) the lack of chronic war, 2) leaders being primarily traders, not warlords and 3) African leaders inability to effectively control the peasant. These are over-arching themes that are a result of the three commonalities discussed throughout this thesis, and provide a stark contrast to state development in Europe.

Weber observes that the chronic state of war was an important condition for the rise of the charismatic warlord. Further readings suggest that war in fact led Europe to centralize its authority structures in order to survive. Countless polities disappeared in the process, not having effectively competed in this rather brutal contest. The cause of war is up for debate, be it population density, man's natural greed or some other factor, but the end result is that war demands efficiency; be it in extracting revenue or administration.

Africa never experienced a chronic state of war. This could be for a variety of reasons. The subsistence economy did not allow for much extra-curricular activity: were individuals to leave the land for an extended period, famine would likely occur. Poor soil conditions, weather or rudimentary technology might have contributed, but the result was the same, individuals spent most of their time tending to their farms. Of course, strongmen would not generally care about a famine lest it affect them. Within the

African context, a famine would affect the strongman as most of his power came from the people.

Contributing to this lack of war could be the difficulty in raising a standing army. Again, a subsistence economy had to play a role, but other factors come in. Africa did not have landlords who could effectively raise an army while keeping others to tend to the fields. African leaders had difficulty maintaining armies for any extended period. Raiding parties were common, but lengthy planned military campaigns rare. The inability of potential competitors to raise an army alleviated the threat to a polity's survival. This is evidenced by the fact that hundreds of polities continued to exist in Africa. Whereas some disappeared due to unrecorded reasons, the historical record shows that even in spite of numerous contractions and expansions of prominent polities, numerous ones remained. They managed to maintain their cohesion in spite of perceived control by another. The center's hold on the periphery has always been tenuous at best, and as long as the 'conquered' polity paid an occasional tribute, it was left intact.

Along with war being the exception rather than the rule was the fact that most African leaders were primarily traders, not warlords. Again, the inability to control the land might have resulted in this phenomenon, but the implications remain. As traders, African entrepreneurs would be less interested in the accumulation of land than the maintenance of stability at minimal cost in order to ensure undisrupted trade. Historically, war harms trade networks. Since African leaders were heavily dependent on trade for revenue, it is unlikely that they would engage in activity that would stifle their income.

War can benefit trade by expanding territory, thus controlling larger trading networks. However, in Africa, controlling trade usually meant one of two things: 1) being able to tax caravans traveling through one's territory or 2) controlling the actual source of the goods. The first suggests that the size of the territory quickly becomes irrelevant. Caravans were usually taxed once upon entering the territory and secondly if they stopped at a market. This would suggest that aggrandizing one's territory did not generate the necessary revenue required to maintain the increased costs.

African traders controlled the actual source of trade. Some, such as the Empire of Mali and Ghana, controlled the salt mines. These mines were fairly localized and not dispersed through great geographical areas in Africa. As such, increasing territory would rarely bring in additional mines and surely generate increased maintenance costs. The trader sought to keep costs at a minimum and given the African trading context, increasing one's territory, or going to war, rarely justified the associated costs.

The inattention to land ownership also made borders and land demarcation a foreign concept within the African context. The trader would not be as concerned as to where his borders began and ended as controlling the people was a rather complicated task. Patron-client systems were inefficient and required what appear to be significant resources given the scarcity in the sub-Saharan region. As a result, the trader would content himself on occasionally making his presence felt by sending a raiding party to a village from time to time.

It must be remembered that the same scarcity affecting the trader affected the village. Thus, the village did not have much to give up in the first place. Were the central authority to raid the nest too often, there was a real possibility that it would simply cease to exist. As long as he could exact occasional tribute and control the necessary centers of gravity of trade, land did not enter the equation. This would once again reinforce the lack of a chronic state of war on the continent.

Tied with the fact that African elites were primarily traders and that war was an uncommon occurrence is the fact that the elites never truly controlled their peasant population. European warlords could coerce their population and separate them from the land to conduct their campaigns. This was never an option in Africa. African strongmen had to accept rather stringent limitation on their power to control men. The control of land was never an option, rather, African leaders had to maintain control with patron-client systems. These were far more delicate as clients are much harder to force and coerce.

African entrepreneurs could not pull their population away from the land without fear of various societal disruptions. Again, scarcity and low yield agriculture come into the equation. Should the peasants leave their land for any extended period, the

community as a whole would not have enough food to support itself. The harvest and planting season was off-limits in terms of diverging the productive capacity of the peasantry away from the land. This would severely hinder the center effort to work on projects that could facilitate its ability to administer the territory.

Weber, Wilks and Herbst all point to the importance of roads as an essential feature of the center's ability to project power. Roads took a lot of time and manpower given the distances, technological limitations and simple engineering requirements. Given the necessity of tending to the plots of land for survival, the center could face severe famine or social unrest in its quest for consolidation. The threat was larger than the perceived benefits for only the Asante seemed to have undertaken such a laborious task.

To add to the center's problems was the simple fact that African peasants were not a captured lot. Should conditions prove too adverse, they could leave and find a more suitable location. The historical record suggests that villages would leave and migrate to a different location should local conditions overwhelm its limited production capacity. If the choice is between road building and survival, survival will likely win out. In sum, all of the African conditions lead to a rather poor context in which to consolidate centralized authority.

Allowing for different historical contexts and variations in political structures, African developmental strategies remained strikingly similar throughout the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial timeframes. Throughout history, a central authority has found itself dealing with a periphery of which the control has been a constant challenge. The most important discontinuity has been the foreign structures imported through colonialization.

Precolonial African regimes began developing from the very foundations of African society. They built their power from the ground up while confronting the limits of centralization imposed by the historical commonalities. As such, their rule was woven with existing social structures and the informal rules governing society. Their capacity was limited, thus they only grew and extended as far as it allowed them to. Consequently, few African polities expanded for significantly long periods.

Post-colonial regimes, on the other hand, took over the remnants of the colonial structures and were without roots in the society they aimed to govern. Colonial structures and institutions remained in the background of the every day life in the village. The village saw signs of the regime, such as a control point, or local court, but did not interact with it unless absolutely necessary or otherwise forced to. The structures had little relevance in its daily life. Initially, the promises that came with independence enticed African societies to interact with the center, on their own terms. Yet, it was clear that the center did not have the capacity to properly manage those few projects in which they got involved [i.e. marketing boards].

Additionally, the center could be rather threatening with their use of foreign structures. African regimes would use the army to force itself upon society, but could only do so for limited amounts of time: the result was often brutal. Central authority was arbitrary. The rules of the games at the center were in a constant state of flux. African societies soon began disengaging with a center.

This societal disengagement further weakened an already anemic center. The center needed the periphery for its continued survival. Without it, the center would lose relevance. Yet, the center's inability to solidify and institutionalize its structures and rules of the game, alongside its poor capacity to develop and implement policy, made it an unappealing partner to its clients. As such, clients began withdrawing from their relationship with the center, taking along whatever limited resources they had in the first place.

As such, the center became desperate to reconnect with the periphery in hopes of maintaining whatever little power they could. Society, then with the upper hand, could re-engage on its own terms through informal channels, effectively 'controlling' the center. In some worst-case scenarios, the periphery never re-engaged and the center remains due to an abundance of natural resources it could easily control without having to engage society.

Regardless, state development in Africa remains strikingly similar throughout its history. It is a struggle between the center and the periphery in which the center is hindered by three commonalities: lack of centralization, communal land ownership and

patron-client systems. These commonalities worked against centralization, each building on the other and helping the periphery maintain a degree of independence rarely seen in other regions of the world.

B. STATE FORMATION IN PERSPECTIVE

The analysis of state formation in Africa highlights some important contrasts with the European model. There is no need to suggest that Africa has a unique set of variables such as ethnicity or tribal affiliation required in understanding her developmental process. Differences in land tenure would affect all regions equally. In the case of Africa and Europe, it is a difference of diffused land control versus concentrated land control. As such, land tenure is an independent variable that affects the dependent variable of state development.

Land tenure is a common variable in analyzing both the European and African experience. It plays an important role in both regions, but with entirely different results. Private landownership in Europe meant that individuals could control others by granting or withholding access to the land. This in turn allowed individuals to accumulate greater wealth and power based on specific control of the land. These individuals represented a small percentage of the population, but became very powerful. Controlling land was synonymous with power, thus individuals sought to increase their landholding, coming into conflict with others based on demarcation. This emphasis on landownership seems to have generated a propensity for warfare, leading to a centralized apparatus that could best defend the interest of those few individual landowners at the expense, for the most part, of the general population. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that although landowners did collaborate with the center, the center did constrain their actions and Europe experienced a great power struggle between the center and the landlords in which the center eventually prevailed.

African communal landownership made it impossible for a group of individual landowners to emerge. Instead, the political entrepreneur seeking power had to find ways of influencing men and controlling men. Whereas the control of land is a one-sided endeavor, a person controls land and the land requires nothing in return, as well as profitable, in the sense that one can extract from the land at a profit, the control of people results in another process altogether. People must have reason to align themselves with

another. Why should one give up individual rights to another if the other cannot force subjugation and offers nothing in return? African strongmen required resources to begin controlling people and extracting resources in the first place: perhaps explaining why controlling trade was so crucial. Trade revenue allowed the accumulation necessary to begin the process of controlling people. These dependence-based relationships complicated the process quite a bit.

Different values of the same independent variable, that of land tenure, resulted in a different value of the dependent variable, that of state development. Each value of the independent variable would have the same effect on either region. Of note, concentrated landownership does not necessarily mean private landownership. Concentrated landownership led to private ownership within the European context, but the analysts should not limit the possibilities based on one particular outcome. Nevertheless, the European experience is important in that it allows the analyst to compare and contrast how differences in the value of an independent variable can lead to different values of the dependent variable. With this example, it is easy conclude that the universal theory of state formation, as discussed by Weber, Tilly and others, is relevant and appropriate when properly applied.

Finally, this thesis shows the importance of historicity in any study. To simply assume that a region lacks history or that history is irrelevant leads to poor analysis and fails to discover the continuity of processes. Weber took great care in studying history while analyzing the European experience and developing the European state model. There is no reason why history can simply be ignored in other regions of the world. It is naïve to assume that history around the world only begins with the arrival of Europeans and their structures. World history is far too rich for Europe to be at its center. Even though African regimes must deal with rootless European institutions, the historical commonalities drive the developmental process in Africa.

C. STATE BUILDING IN AFRICA

State building in Africa is and has always been a challenge. Using the model as sketched by Max Weber, this thesis tries in turn to draw a sketch of the state development process in Africa. This is but a brief look into what was assuredly a long and complex

process deserving more attention than the few following paragraphs. As with Europe, it begins with the accumulation of power.

African chiefs were not similar to the European charismatic leader. As such, it is unlikely that the African chief would become the same type of king into which the European charismatic leader evolved. The authority of the African chiefs depended on their standing within society. This was based on multiple criteria: popularity, group affiliation, and overall competence. Their access to power started with a dependence on society, not their ability to meet external threats and undertake war.

The existence of the African chief differed markedly from his European counterparts as his existence did depend on others and not solely upon a chronic state of war. As such, African leaders had to find ways to appease or satisfy those upon whom their position depended upon, leading to patron-client systems. Contrary to the European experience, these structures placed the interests of the system with the ruled, not the ruler. As such, power was much more decentralized, the most extreme form of decentralization occurring with such societies as the Tivs or Ibos. On the other side of the spectrum, certain societies produced Kings. These Kings were little more than the chief of chiefs. As such, the African King's power was more constrained than that of his European counterpart as its source was ultimately society itself.

These structures, such as they were, complicated the accumulation of already scant resources. Further complicating the calculation of African leaders was the need for resources to set up patron-client systems in the first place. Their primary occupation thus seems to have been finding means of taxing commerce at its choke points, the markets and source of goods. This required a minimal amount of force and allowed the leaders to generate limited revenue to set up dependence based relationships that would in turn free them from the land as much as possible given the subsistence basis of African societies.

This process led to a different ending than the European experience. The result in Europe was an evolution of a political-territorial association that sought to monopolize violence. The African result was a weak center fighting to maintain its detachment from society but heavily dependent on those it sought to control. This led to very decentralized authority structures that emphasized servicing or maintenance of the population in return

for recognition of rule or status as ‘Big Man.’ The ultimate ‘Big Man’ being an African King such as the Asantehene or Mogho Naba.

The processes of power accumulation and regime building occurred in both African and Europe. It is simply that each region had different values of the same variable to work with. It is not that the European peasant wanted to give autonomy to the center; it is simply that the structures that emerged from the base favored the center. In Africa, the social structures favored the periphery. These processes, with all their limitation and constraints, continue today.

D. DOMESTIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Modern African leaders continue in the pursuit of the accumulation of power. Yet, today, their main instruments are imported from the European experience, ones that have little relevance to their society given the African context. Nevertheless, weak central control is nothing new to Africa as the center has always managed to survive with limited resources. In the past, the center had emerged with the support of society, while modern African regimes were imposed upon society by exogenous powers. Today, societal disengagement has left the center even fewer resources than it had to begin with. This means that the center’s attempt to manage patron-client systems is weakening as it is increasingly unable to provide the social services clients require to remain engaged in the first place.

The limitations of African society and its accompanying structures have overcome the center’s efforts towards regime strengthening and consolidation. As such, new strategies are needed in attempts to overcome structural limitations. In the worst-case scenario, central authority is content on controlling mineral resources and selling them to the international community while forgoing all attempts to reconnect with society. In these cases, their power is no longer rooted in society, but in their ability to control limited areas and sell to the international community. As such, they are outward looking regimes. In other cases, central authority continues to promote the current societal disorder as a last ditch effort to retain limited power, realizing that reconnecting power to its traditional roots would diminish their own power or push them aside completely. In many cases, they use the military to protect their remaining personal power, funding it at the expense of everything else.

A few African leaders, well aware of their own limitations, as are most, are trying to build decentralized and flexible structures in the hope of accommodating society and re-engaging it. The more a leader tries to monopolize authority, the more the leader loses control of society. One example of such a leader is Alpha Konaré of Mali. He is attempting to build structures appropriate to the African context.

Konaré is giving back an amount of control to the different regions; he has increased his own ability to influence events while enhancing the capacity of his central administration. Realizing the limitations of his administrative apparatus, he does not seem to be trying to make it do more than it can handle, preferring to do what it can well. One perfect example is Konaré's support of *Kafo Jiginew*, a union of cotton-growers. He allowed them to form a credit union and to build schools and clinics. Eventually, these initiatives will benefit the central administration by promoting economic growth and an educated and healthy workforce at no expense to the administration. This bodes well for such a poor administration. Only time will tell whether Konaré succeeded in reconnecting and consolidating his regime. It could very well be that true success would mean that these decentralized structures would become the true authority and the center would cease to have all meaning whatsoever.

Scarcity is a fact most regimes must deal with. The resources to draw upon are limited. This imposes certain restrictions on the center as limited resources tend to translate into limited means. Thus, the center must focus its limited resources on those aspects it considers most crucial. Just like their historical predecessors, modern regimes are much more dependent on the support of society than their western counterparts.

True, most modern regimes continue to function, albeit minimally, without the support of the societies in which they operate. Yet, should they ever want to take root, to gain capacity and relevance and to increase their power, they must reconnect with society. Society is, within the African context, the true arbiter of power. As such, they should find ways of gaining relevance within the eyes of society in order for them to be recognized as legitimate by those they depend upon to stay in power in the first place. Many modern leaders such as Mugabe and Éyadéma are ignoring this and finding their hold on society to be increasingly tenuous. Again, the more the center seeks to control,

the less they in fact control as society simply disengages and they lose relevance in the eyes of all but themselves and a few interested individuals.

E. INTERNATIONAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The costs of intervention in Africa are enormous. The most cost effective way for the western power to deal with Africa is by allowing its internal struggles to work themselves out. Problems in Africa are a result of domestic social structural conditions. As such, the best means for African to sort itself out is to let the processes take place without external factors. The international community can be most effective by not intervening in Africa. A few things would help ensure the results of the internal power struggles are sustainable and stabilizing.

The first thing outside agents should consider is dropping the debt burden while simultaneously ending all foreign aid. African regimes took loans to pay off interest on previous loans and have no realistic means to pay off their debt. The little money they have could be better spent dealing with pressing social issues, of which AIDS is but one. However, forgiving debt is but one step of the process. It is important to stop giving aid in its entirety. African regimes must become self-sufficient. As it stands, many regimes survive mainly on external funding. Even more twisted is the fact that most of this external lending is necessary to pay off debt engendered by foreign lending in the first place. Nevertheless, regimes can continue to survive without considering society as long as they keep receiving external funding. Simply shifting the recipients of external aid is not necessarily the answer; those in the center are maneuvering into positions in NGOs to keep receiving foreign largesse. Forcing the center to look inward in an attempt to generate revenue is necessary. This will result in one of two alternatives; either the center will reconnect and begin extracting necessary revenue, governing on a historically limited scale or it will simply cease to exist, unable to survive without it. These two steps combined are the most important ones outside actors can take in their dealing with Africa in letting the domestic struggles sort themselves out and helping true stability return.

The United States and other powers want stability in Africa. Stability means less expenditure and in some cases, such as Rwanda, less embarrassment. Yet, there are many factors involved. Multi-nationals will continue dealing with regimes such as Angola and Liberia where they can extract profit. It is not realistic to expect them to

cease their business arrangements for the collective good of Africa. Perhaps increased awareness will lead to eventual public pressure for them to withdraw until historically grounded regimes can develop. This is unlikely, but it is nice to think about the possibilities. Where the United States and other powers can most effectively make a difference is with their influence within the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. By erasing debt and ceasing loans the United States and others can best help Africa sort its own domestic problems. This should be done even though many of the current African regimes, for fear of their own survival, will protest vehemently against such measures, calling the United States and others racist nations sitting silently while Africa crumbles. Africa cannot rebuild until it crumbles.

The western powers need to allow Africa a potential plunge into war and possibly resort to authority based on very low levels of centralization. The modern African regime can only develop by reconnecting itself to the village and placing itself within the African historical context. It appears as this is becoming a more likely possibility as many international actors are withdrawing from war torn areas or simply ignoring entire regions.

In the end, there is no guarantee that such efforts will succeed. Indeed, Africa has been altered in ways that are unlikely to allow it to revert to its precolonial past. Yet, Africa will not be able to effectively meet the challenges ahead if the village is simply ignored while the center holds on to whatever power it can, using every means at its disposal. The current policy of not allowing state collapse or border realignment is flawed, to not allow for a state to whither goes against Europe's own experience. This is an area where the west might want to look at its own experience and applicability to the African condition. European states emerged from a process, one that allowed some to survive while others perished. This is one historical commonality that both Africa and Europe shared until Europe withdrew it as an option for Africa.

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